

LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA
NINETY-EIGHTH LEGISLATURE
FIRST SESSION
LEGISLATIVE BILL 680

Introduced by Wehrbein, 2; Baker, 44

Read first time January 22, 2003

Committee: Education

A BILL

- 1 FOR AN ACT relating to schools; to state intent; to create a
- 2 commission; to provide duties for the commission; and to
- 3 declare an emergency.
- 4 Be it enacted by the people of the State of Nebraska,

1 Section 1. The Legislature finds that:

2 (1) Rural education plays a vital role in Nebraska's
3 future. Students graduating from Nebraska's schools need access to
4 a curriculum designed to allow success in postsecondary educational
5 programs, in the workplace, and as contributing members of our
6 society. Nebraska schools must provide a wide variety of quality
7 courses taught by qualified teachers. Currently, there are schools
8 in rural Nebraska where, in order for the school to maintain the
9 desired curriculum offering and accreditation, there are many
10 classes with few students, and often only one student, per class;

11 (2) There is a decline in student population in rural
12 Nebraska. According to a recent study, forty-nine percent of the
13 school districts in Nebraska have fewer than one hundred students.
14 These school districts must actively seek partnership opportunities
15 to meet the needs of their students. However, many districts are
16 currently resisting merging with other districts because of the
17 possibility of losing state aid;

18 (3) The State of Nebraska should consider providing
19 incentives and expanded opportunities for small school districts to
20 partner with each other in order to provide an optimal education
21 for each student;

22 (4) With limited dollars available, reducing
23 administrative costs within schools is crucial. The sharing of
24 administrative services between and among school districts offers a
25 tremendous opportunity to reduce those costs and enable a greater
26 portion of state resources to go directly to the classroom. In
27 addition to reduced costs, the sharing will allow greater skills
28 and expertise to help improve the overall operations of our

1 districts; and

2 (5) Students are best served by school systems that
3 provide curriculum opportunities and are governed and financed as
4 K-12 school systems.

5 Sec. 2. It is the intent of the Legislature that there
6 be fewer school districts, not necessarily fewer schools, in the
7 State of Nebraska by 2005.

8 Sec. 3. The Nebraska Commission for Quality Education is
9 created. The purpose of the commission is to study the best method
10 of developing partnerships among small school districts.

11 The commission shall be appointed by the Governor and
12 shall consist of one member representing the State Department of
13 Education, two current or former educators, two current or former
14 superintendents, three members representing school districts with
15 fewer than one hundred students, and two other interested parties
16 not actively involved in the profession of education. The Governor
17 shall appoint the chairperson of the commission.

18 The commission shall begin its study as soon as
19 practicable after the effective date of this act and shall complete
20 the study and submit a written report and recommendations to the
21 Legislature on or before December 15, 2003.

22 Sec. 4. The study required by section 3 of this act
23 shall include, but need not be limited to, the following:

24 (1) The possibility of requiring all school districts to
25 offer instruction in kindergarten through grade twelve. This would
26 require that each Class I and Class VI system merge into one school
27 district, with a general governance set over each district and that
28 school district consist of at least one hundred students;

1 (2) The possibility of giving smaller, necessarily
2 existing schools one-time startup money to become technologically
3 connected to a larger school in the area and become a part of the
4 larger school district;

5 (3) In order to deal with the problem of school districts
6 being unwilling to merge at the risk of losing state aid, creating
7 a five-year hold-harmless provision in the law to encourage school
8 districts to merge; and

9 (4) Setting a moratorium on closing any school for a
10 certain number of years or as long as there are a certain number of
11 students in the school, whichever comes first.

12 Sec. 5. The Nebraska Commission for Quality Education
13 may request that each school district with a population of fewer
14 than one hundred students in grades nine through twelve or a total
15 population of fewer than two hundred fifty students in kindergarten
16 through grade twelve develop a quality education goal statement.
17 The statement should include curriculum content, administrative
18 functions, and total district expense budgets for a four-year
19 period beginning with school year 2003-04. The statement should
20 also include options for partnership with other schools in the area
21 and other ideas for reducing the cost of education while increasing
22 the quality. The commission may also require that the school
23 district consider the items listed in section 4 of this act.

24 The statements should be submitted to the commission by a
25 date determined by the commission to give it time to review the
26 ideas submitted in the statements and incorporate them into the
27 report the commission submits to the Legislature.

28 Sec. 6. Since an emergency exists, this act takes effect

LB 680

LB 680

1 when passed and approved according to law.